

# The Army and Congress

## Thoughts From the Secretary

**The Honorable Louis Caldera, Secretary of the Army**

**I**T MAY SEEM UNUSUAL at first impression for this journal, which is dedicated to warfighting and doctrinal issues, to devote a special edition to congressional affairs. However, as the articles contributed by Army leaders and several key members of Congress illustrate, maintaining effective relations with the Congress is a critical factor in Army readiness. Constitutionally, Congress exercises great power over Army budgets and programs. Congress takes very seriously all the law-making, budget-writing and oversight responsibilities of its role in providing for national security. If it does not make sense to the Congress, it will not get funded. Consequently, explaining Army issues and providing timely and accurate information and advice to the Congress are a warfighter's business. Indeed, effective relations with the Congress are so vital that the Army is currently working diligently to properly develop soldiers with expertise in congressional affairs.

As a recent example of how congressional affairs affect warfighters, look back to the summer of 1998 as we sought congressional approval of the president's fiscal year 1999 budget request. When the budget emerged from the House of Representatives, the National Security Committee had cut over \$600 million from the Army's Operation and Maintenance account, which includes readiness dollars

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that pay for, among other things, training exercises and spare parts. The Army had to spend three hard months convincing House members and staffers that there was a justifiable need for those dollars. In the end, the funding was restored through the defense authorization conference process, but not without considerable effort on the Army's part.

These kinds of challenges might be avoided in the future if we all do a better job of providing timely and accurate information to the Congress, especially early in the budget process. This one example illustrates the need for effective Army-Congress



US Army

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relations. Further evidence can be gleaned from the observations and recommendations of members of Congress found in subsequent pages of this special edition. I highly recommend their careful reading. Indeed, I hope anyone aspiring to be a senior Army leader gives this edition an accessible location on his or her bookshelf.

As a general matter, Army leaders need to listen carefully and take seriously ideas and recommendations emanating from Congress. We will not always agree with them or be able to satisfy their requests—maybe not even very often. But we will learn a great amount about what their perceptions and concerns are about Army capabilities and initiatives. In the competition for scarce defense budget dollars, that understanding is critical. In fact, all of our interaction with Congress—from congressional visits to the field, to office calls with members, to responding to congressional inquiries—must be done with the full cognizance of and sensitivity to the constitutional role Congress plays as repre-

sentatives of the people. Ensuring that Congress understands our priorities and resource requirements helps the legislative branch fulfill its constitutional responsibilities to provide for the national defense.

Since my confirmation as the secretary of the Army in July 1998, one of my top priorities has been to improve Army-Congress relations. One factor in our relations, our communications strategy, deserves special emphasis. Simply put, we have to do a good job telling the Army story. We must take steps to ensure that, as Senator Carl Levin advises later in this edition, we speak to the Congress about Army priorities with one voice. For example, infighting among the Active and Reserve Components is counterproductive for both the Army and the nation. We must think, act and *be* Total Army. All components—Active, Reserve, National Guard and Department of the Army civilians—must contribute to developing and supporting the Army's program, budget and message. Just as important, that message must be communicated to the Congress clearly.

As part of an effective communications strategy, the entire Army, not just that part located in Washington, must step up its efforts to familiarize the Congress with the Army, including our values, heritage, issues and programs. This is particularly true since, as several members of Congress note herein, the trend of a declining number of members and staffers with military experience is likely to continue.

The Army's Office of the Chief, Legislative Liaison (OCLL) helps monitor and communicate to the Congress the status of our programs and policies, answers congressional inquiries and monitors nominations and confirmations. However, while OCLL plays a critical role, it is the Army's civilian leadership, commanders and general officers from all three components and senior career civilians who, day-in and day-out, strengthen Army-Congress relations.

Before coming to Washington, I served for five years as an assemblyman in the California legislature, including service as a committee chairman. Life as an elected official is very fast-paced and covers a wide array of issues, leaving precious little time to study any given issue in great detail. Therefore, timely and accurate information and cogent and concise analysis are at a premium. Those individuals and organizations who provide it generally earn credibility and, with that, congressional confidence in their programs and priorities. We must keep this in mind as we work together to take care of soldiers and their families and to ensure the Army is able to meet the nation's needs.

Sometimes the Army's culture is a contributing factor to why our relationship with Congress and its members is not as well developed as it should be. There is a widely held belief in our institution that anything political is antithetical and inappropriate to professional military conduct, and that, since Congress is part of the political establishment, it should be dealt with at a distance, if at all. This orientation leads to, and in some cases is even used to justify, a truncated relationship with Congress, which in the end undermines our ability to take care of soldiers and serve the nation. This attitude undervalues the constitutional role Congress plays in providing for the national defense. Moreover, a Congress dealt with at a distance is left to make decisions without full and accurate information, and that leaves the Army at risk when it comes to budgetary and policy decisions. This belief also undermines our efforts to develop leaders who are both warriors and effective communicators with Congress.

Our Army and our nation have been served well by leaders who could do both. Generals Colin L. Powell, John Shalikashvili, Barry R. McCaffrey and

George A. Joulwan immediately come to mind as just a sample of recently retired four-star generals who could do it all. We are fortunate to have many senior leaders today who, like Army Chief of Staff

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General Dennis J. Reimer, clearly understand the importance of effective Army-Congress relations. To sustain development of these critical leader skills, we need to create an educational- and experience-based system that routinely produces general officers capable of commanding troops and effectively dealing with Congress. As Congressman Floyd Spence notes in his panel response, having Army leaders versed in both of these skills is critical to current and future readiness.

The other military services place a premium on their relationship with Congress, and accordingly, their congressional liaison jobs are viewed as career enhancing and they are rewarded. In the US Marine Corps, for example, Terry Paul, an infantryman, has been promoted from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general while serving eight years in legislative affairs. Regardless of whether he might have preferred to be with troops, the Marine Corps recognized the importance of congressional liaison and the trust and confidence that is developed with members of Congress over time when a service stabilizes assignments in congressional affairs.

Although I am not suggesting that the Army should keep its future general officers out of the field for extended periods, I do believe that we should take steps to change our professional development guidance to make assignments in congressional affairs more career enhancing and desirable. I know there has been progress in this regard recently with the assignment to OCLL of former battalion commanders and soon-to-be battalion commanders, as well as increased participation in the Army Congressional Fellows Program. I encourage all components and branches in the Army to continue this trend. While members of Congress will listen to all

soldiers, they particularly value the input of field soldiers. Whether assigned to congressional offices or not, our developing leaders must consider knowledge of, and the ability to deal with, the Congress as an integral part of their professional development.

The changes afoot under Officer Personnel Management System XXI initiatives provide a great opportunity to change our assignment philosophy to enhance congressional affairs. In addition to having officers from the operational track serving periodic assignments with OCLL, we would also benefit by having officers from the other career fields, such as strategists, public affairs officers and civil affairs officers, with expertise in legislative affairs gained through frequent assignments in Congress-related positions. Such soldiers can advance the Army's interests by establishing long-term relationships with members of Congress and key congressional staffers, thereby providing continuity in their functional areas. In addition, these officers could serve as trainers for those who spend fewer years and assignments in legislative liaison. With this type of personnel management approach, we would have both the operators who can provide firsthand reports about the conditions and needs in the field and the seasoned and experienced specialists Congress relies on for servicewide information and continuity.

The Army should also consider changes in professional military education to sensitize officers to the critical role that the Congress plays in resourcing and managing the Armed Forces. Company grade officers would benefit from a "Congress 101" course to explain Congress's role, readiness from the legislature's perspective and how effective dealings with congressional delegations can advance the Army's cause. Moreover, we should also reinforce to all officers, particularly future company commanders, why timely and accurate responses to congressional inquiries are a must. Demonstrating sensitivity and diligence in this key area advances our interests by enabling members of Congress to satisfy people who are very important to them—their constituents. Senator Jack Reed reinforces this point in his article on page 36. Reed, a former airborne infantry company commander, is someone who knows, having served six years in the House of

Representatives and two years in the US Senate, including his membership on the Senate Armed Services Committee. These competencies for junior officers should be emphasized and developed at the

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respective branch Officer Advance Courses and the Combined Arms and Services Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Similarly, majors and lieutenant colonels would benefit from a more in-depth examination of the congressional process. Seminars at the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and the Army War College led by professional staff members and military legislative assistants, as well as role-playing exercises for CGSC students, would educate field grade officers on the nuances of the congressional process and its key participants. Over the long term, such curriculum changes can greatly enhance our Army's readiness.

As we try to balance current and future readiness in a resource-constrained environment, we cannot afford to lose any opportunity to tell the Army story to Congress. By making congressional relations everyone's business, as well as assigning successful soldiers to represent the Army's needs before the Congress and rewarding their service, we will enhance our communication with the legislative branch, a critical piece of the readiness equation. By working more closely with Congress, we will better address the needs of the Army and our nation. **MR**

*Secretary Louis Caldera was sworn in as the 17th secretary of the Army on 2 July 1998. Before assuming his current position, he served in the California legislature for five years representing the 46th Assembly district. He received a B.S. from the US Military Academy, an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and a J.D. from Harvard Law School. He served as a commissioned officer in the US Army from 1978 to 1983. His assignments included serving as a military police platoon leader, a battalion intelligence officer and a battalion executive officer. After his active duty service, he served in the US Army Reserve.*